

Sponsored Programs Support for Homeland Security

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Introduction

Threats to homeland security were reasonably well-documented prior to the September 11, 2001 attack on The World Trade Center but did not command the appropriate attention. Anthony Lake, in a book published in 2000, warned of six threats that could jeopardize the security of the United States: (1) the potential use of biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons by terrorists; (2) cyberterror and cybercrime to disrupt the economy and communications; (3) the exploitation of military battlefields of the future by small states to conduct "ambiguous warfare" using unconventional means; (4) improper or non-strategic use of peacekeeping operations; (5) the impact on the American economy of an economic downturn in other areas of the world; and (6) partisan politics dividing the government and alienating the American people (Lake, 2000). And, in a 2001 book, Michael Osterholm and John Swartz predicted the imminence of bioterrorism because of three factors: (1) terrorists are motivated to carry out such an attack; (2) infectious agents are available, and (3) such agents can be delivered to targets (Osterholm and Schwartz, 2001). After that attack a renewed and intensified response was evident throughout the government and the nation. The War on Terrorism had begun.

The War on Terrorism has resulted in new authorities for government agencies and significant new funding for projects related to homeland security. Although funding is available for many types of projects, much of the focus is on detection technologies, diagnostic procedures, and new drugs and vaccines to protect the public against biological agents. One of the foremost funding programs is Bioshield, an initiative to develop vaccines and treatments for smallpox, anthrax, botulinum toxin, Ebola virus, and plague which was first announced by President George Bush in his State of the Union address in January 2003. But, other funding initiatives related to homeland security are available, including resources for and equipping of local organizations responsible for providing the first response to citizens. Of note is the wartime supplemental appropriations bill (H.R. 1559) that provided \$2.23 billion for grants to first responders through the Office of Domestic Preparedness.

How can one navigate the maze of the government grants process to secure funding through one of these programs? Members of a profession often referred to as research administration provide assistance to researchers and other personnel seeking funding for projects across a spectrum of disciplines and continue to provide oversight and assistance following receipt of an award. Perhaps a better term would

be sponsored projects administration since many of the funded programs are not research studies but community service, implementation, demonstration, or education projects. But, the term persists because the larger number and greatest amount of monies are available for basic and applied research. Regardless of the project, the services rendered by these professionals and the grants process are the same.

The Society of Research Administrators (SRA) International is a nonprofit, professional association dedicated to the education and professional development of research administrators and enhancing the public understanding of the importance of research and other funded programs and their administration. SRA International seeks innovative programming and a wide variety of outreach activities to achieve its mission. With focused public interest and significant new funding available for biodefense research, SRA International planned and will deliver a videoconference featuring national experts addressing the various issues related to biodefense. The videoconference will be released as a Webcast on January 15, 2004 and continue to be available to subscribers for several months.

The Webcast: Conception, Planning, and Delivery

With the proliferation of new funding programs and new regulations governing activities related to biodefense and homeland security, a vehicle for informing research administrators, researchers, project directors, and the public was necessary. SRA International responded by authorizing the development of a videoconference focusing on issues particularly relevant to biodefense research. This volunteer effort using a team approach has resulted in the Webcast entitled *Biodefense: Research, Resources, and Responsibility*, which is being co-chaired by Kathleen Hogue Gonzalez, CRA and William H. Caskey, PhD. Initially, the research community and research administrators were targeted as the primary audience. However, as the program evolved, the audience was expanded to include persons involved in policymaking, healthcare, emergency preparedness, civilian defense, the media, and the general public. Since the expanded audience included persons that are not usual clients of research administrators, strategies for appropriate content and advertising followed new avenues. For example, one general interest organization provides a weekly newsletter discussing issues related to homeland security to 27,500 subscribers, most of whom are not involved in research. Another electronic mailing list of similar magnitude was purchased, the list being exclusively research scientists with expertise and research interests in topics relevant to biodefense. So, program content and the advertising had to interest and challenge both technical and non-technical people concerned about homeland security.

A discussion of all aspects of research and research administration related to biodefense was clearly impossible. Early discussions limited the areas of focus to: funding programs, examples of successful programs receiving federal funding, international issues, scientific freedom and national security, conducting funded projects with attention to security and biosafety, interactions with local citizens in

areas adjacent to biodefense research facilities, and the emerging academic consortium for homeland security at The Ohio State University. Experts in these areas from stakeholder agencies and organizations were identified, contacted, and invited to speak. The co-chairs of the Webcast, along with SRA International staff, scheduled conference calls for each of the focus areas with those persons who had agreed to participate in the various segments of the program. Through a series of discussions, the content and audience of each segment of the Webcast were defined. SRA International staff scheduled videotaping for the studio segments and participants provided videotapes made on location for community interactions, the academic consortium for homeland security, and center for excellence at Texas A&M University. Although a number of excellent university-based biodefense research programs exist, the Disaster Relief and Emergency Medical Services (DREAMS) program at Texas A&M University was selected because it is a large, multi-disciplinary, multi-institution project that not only includes basic research but the application of that research to civilian defense and emergency preparedness. DREAMS uses computer and telecommunications technology and research in basic and clinical sciences to improve trauma victims' survival, particularly in isolated areas and combat zones beyond the physical reach of trauma specialists in well-equipped medical centers.

Advertising for the Webcast has begun, initially targeting members of SRA International. Additional promotion to the membership occurred at the annual meeting in Pittsburgh, PA October 20-22, 2003 through video clips of the Webcast and will be followed by additional electronic advertisements. Promotional activity to selected research scientists, general public mailing lists, and advertising on Web sites of organizations whose members or activities relate to biodefense are currently underway. The information contained in such advertising has been developed specifically for each intended audience.

Projected Outcomes

SRA International anticipates an increased awareness of available funding for programs related to biodefense and a greater understanding of new rules and regulations affecting such activities among subscribers to the Webcast. Such knowledge should translate into more effective service by our members to their clients and promote relevant research programs and other activities within the constraints imposed by national security. About 350 sites across the United States representing colleges, universities, hospitals, independent research organizations, for profit companies, and general interest organizations are expected to subscribe to the Webcast.

Another potential outcome of the Webcast should be a greater awareness of resources available for identifying potential sponsors for projects related to homeland security and the application process among the general public and other people not involved in scientific research. And, personnel involved in the administration of sponsored projects generally have access to such resources and are knowledgeable with respect to preparing applications and administering the

projects. Furthermore, many of the new funding initiatives seek to promote collaboration among community organizations and personnel in local sponsored projects offices can assist coordinating these collaborative efforts. State-funded colleges and universities have a public service component to their mission, but, more than that, research administrators tend to be service-oriented people willing to provide assistance to grant-seekers.

If the Webcast is successful, SRA International will have produced another innovative, outreach program directed toward fulfilling its mission. But, more importantly, SRA International will have provided necessary and important information to practitioners actively involved in various aspects of homeland security, especially in biodefense, and will have contributed to a more secure America.

The Future

As stated earlier, the subject matter of the Webcast was limited by necessity. Additional areas related to biodefense for future consideration include research and new product development in industry, agricultural and ecological terrorism, patent technologies, and social and psychological aspects of biological warfare and biodefense. And, as noted by Lake (2001) and many others, the tactics of terrorists are not limited to biological weaponry and information about funding initiatives in other areas related to homeland security must be made available. More can always be done. H. G. Wells (1921) seemed to have looked forward to today when he said, "Human history becomes more and more a race between education and catastrophe".

References

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